

Washington, DC -- The nonpartisan Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) today awarded U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) an A+, for his leadership and voting record on key Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' issues including the GI Bill, Veterans Administration (VA) funding and mental health care.

"Since taking office, I have fought to provide our veterans and their families with the support and services they deserve," **said Arcuri**. "Coming from a family of veterans, I am proud to be part of a Congress committed to providing for our nation's veterans and service members. I will continue to work with veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan to ensure their unique needs are met and their sacrifices never forgotten. "

The nonpartisan IAVA Action Fund's 2008 Congressional Report Card grades every Senator and Congressman on his or her legislative accomplishments for veterans. The Report Card recognizes the 110th Congress' unprecedented achievements on behalf of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. A searchable version of the Report Card can be found at <http://www.veteranreportcard.org/>

Since taking office, Arcuri has worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to implement an ambitious agenda to honor our nation's commitment to veterans and service members. The U.S. House of Representatives has passed, with Arcuri's strong support, legislation including:

- The largest increase for veterans' health care in the Veterans Administration's 77-year history, adding more than 1,800 new caseworkers to reduce the backlog of benefits claims.
- The Wounded Warriors Assistance Act (H.R. 1538) provides the staffing, training, and oversight necessary to ensure that our wounded warriors receive the quality care they deserve.
- The Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act (H.R. 3997) makes permanent tax provisions to relieve economic hardships for military families.

Included below is a list of key veterans' legislation passed by the House of Representatives with Rep. Arcuri's strong support:

U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri **Veterans Accomplishments in the 110th Congress**

The largest funding increase for the Department of Veterans Affairs in our nation's history Arcuri supported the largest increase for veterans' health care in the VA's 77-year history, adding more than 3,100 new VA caseworkers to reduce the backlog of 400,000 benefits claims. This \$6.6 billion increase over the 2007 level fulfills our nation's obligation to its servicemen and women, veterans, and their families and is \$3.7 billion over the Administration's request.

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (H.R. 4986) increases military pay by 3.9 percent and prohibits fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy program following Administration proposals to nearly double co-pays for prescription drugs for veterans and increase TRICARE premiums by over \$1,000 per year for military retirees.

The Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act (H.R. 6081) provides \$2 billion in tax relief for military families, including IRS provisions to: permit active duty reservists to make penalty-free withdrawals from retirement plans; permit an employer to make contributions to a qualified retirement plan on behalf of an employee killed or disabled in combat; count extra pay for active duty military personnel from their previous civilian employer for retirement purposes; and permit recipients of military death benefit gratuities to roll over the amounts received, tax-free, to a Roth IRA or an Education Savings Account.

Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act (H.R. 5740) restores full four-year college scholarships for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans – on a par with educational benefits available after World War II. This new GI Bill will make Iraq and Afghanistan veterans part of an American economic recovery, just as the veterans of World War II helped grow and strengthen the American middle class.

The Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 327) directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. Specifically, this bill provides: training for personnel with interaction with veterans; screening of veterans for risk factors of suicide; designation of suicide prevention counselors at all VA medical centers; and a national 24-hour toll free suicide hotline run out of the Canandaigua VA.

The Small Business Lending Improvements Act (H.R. 1332) will ensure that our returning servicemen and women are afforded every opportunity to start or expand a small business by establishing a dedicated Small Business Administration 7(a) loan program for veterans. By creating a lending structure tailored specifically for veterans, this legislation will help address the obstacles faced by small business owners deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan by eliminating borrower and lender fees and increasing to 90 percent the government guaranty for loans to veterans.

The Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act (H.R. 1470) requires that chiropractic care be available at no fewer than 75 veterans medical centers by Dec. 31, 2009, and at all veterans medical centers by Dec. 31, 2011.

The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (H.R. 1284) honors our disabled veterans by increasing, effective December 1, 2007, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans. This long-overdue legislation will ensure that our disabled veterans are able to make ends meet.

The Wounded Warriors Assistance Act (H.R. 1538) addresses the problems at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and other VA health centers by greatly improving staffing, training, and oversight at these facilities. Among various improvements, this legislation requires the assignment of a medical case manager and service member advocate to veterans receiving outpatient medical care; establishes a toll-free hot line to report deficiencies in VA and DOD medical facilities; and improves training standards for health care professionals, case managers, and service member advocates.

The Traumatic Brain Injury Health Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act (H.R. 2199) authorizes new research centers for traumatic brain injuries and requires the establishment of a comprehensive program to treat traumatic brain injuries at VA health centers. It also establishes a comprehensive program to screen veterans for brain injuries and authorizes a pilot program of mobile centers, which are intended to improve access to readjustment counseling for returning veterans.

The Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act (H.R. 612) extends from two to five years following discharge or release the eligibility period for veterans who served in combat during or after the Persian Gulf War to receive hospital care, medical services, or nursing home

care provided by the VA. It also provides for an additional three years of eligibility for veterans discharged more than five years before the enactment of this act who had not been previously enrolled.

The Veterans Outreach Improvement Act (H.R. 67) establishes VA program to provide assistance to states for outreach to veterans and their families to provide information and assistance in applying for benefits and programs. The bill requires the VA to direct assistance to areas with large and growing veteran populations and establishes a grant program to provide financial assistance to states for outreach activities, cooperative relationships, and to develop benefit claims.

Defenders of Freedom Tax Relief Act (H.R. 3997) includes tax provisions and changes to the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program intended to assist military personnel and their families, veterans, volunteer firefighters and emergency medical services personnel, and volunteers in the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps Program.

Veterans Guaranteed Bonus Act (H.R. 3793) guarantees that no service member who passes away, is retired, or separated for disability will be required to repay any portion of a bonus or similar benefit that he or she had received. The bill mandates that the estates of such service members must be paid the full contracted amount of any unpaid bonus or similar benefit as if he or she had continued to serve in the military not later than 90 days after the date of death, retirement, or separation of the service member.

#